The Culture of Beauty III

Beauty, Media, Self-Love

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
The Culture of Beauty Defined	6
Chapter 1: The Body	9
Chapter 2: Media Influences	13
Chapter 3: Love Yourself	23
Bibliography	25
Sayings	26

Introduction

As women, we often forget that we are *simply* beautiful without making any adjustments to our faces and bodies. We also forget that there are other types of beauty aside from physical beauty.

Though these are simple truths, we often live our lives constantly trying to *enhance* our bodies in some shape or form to be *more* beautiful and to *appear* more attractive to ourselves and others.

One day, I decided to go one year of not utilizing any makeup products. This experience helped me to love and accept my natural self, *more* than I did before I commenced the journey; my self-esteem and self-confidence inevitably benefitted and soared from completing this journey. I have never heavily and consistently utilized makeup, but I still often used mascara and eyeliner to give me that "pop". This journey of not using makeup enlightened me of how dependent a woman can

become on even the simplest makeup tools and techniques to enhance her appearance.

The culture of beauty thrives on others' consistent dependence on different "beauty enhancing" techniques such as cosmetics, plastic surgery, and fad diets; my goal is to avoid dependence on beauty enhancing techniques to prevent myself from being an active participant in this artificial culture.

I spent a lot of my life as an unconscious participant in the culture of beauty. The consistent messages, advertisements, and media have affected me at many points in my life, and I often allowed (without even realizing it) these messages to internalize and influence me in ways that made me more self-conscious of my body. I know that if the media and the beauty industry have affected me, then they have probably affected numerous others as well.

This book derived from a research paper I completed at the University of Georgia. I felt it necessary to expand on the paper because beauty culture affects ample amounts of people across the globe, which makes it a relevant topic. I do not write this book to criticize the beauty industry, but to speak candidly about it. I do not write this book to chastise people who take meticulous care of their appearance and utilize beauty techniques to enhance their appearance.

The purpose of this piece is to communicate how the culture of beauty can affect people in ways they may not even realize; furthermore, I write this book to help people understand the reasons *why* they choose to engage in beauty enhancing techniques. There is a difference between being brainwashed and influenced to believe your body is inadequate versus consciously, but still willingly participating in beauty culture because you want to--knowing your natural body is *good enough*.

Destiny S. Harris

The Culture of Beauty Defined

You may ask, "What is the culture of beauty?" According to Caffrey (2015), “The culture of beauty refers to the prevalent standards of physical attractiveness as dictated by popular opinion.”

Within this culture, certain features are usually focused on such as symmetry, body weight, hair type, and skin tone. The media (e.g. music, magazines, film, entertainment, news, and advertisements) greatly influences what is considered beautiful and attractive.

If you take time to observe the media, you may notice that most women who are in news, film, entertainment, and broadcasting industries are often young (or look younger than their age) and are doused with makeup to *enhance* their physical appearance. Older women, and presumably less attractive (according to Western

societal ideals) women, are often shunned by society and are not often seen in the visible spotlight; *it is as if once a woman ceases to be a sexually consumable object or past a presumable reproductive age, she loses value*. Furthermore, there seems to be a negative correlation between a woman's value and the age of her body. You may also notice that there are considerably *more* men, who are older, that are actively involved in the industries I listed above in comparison to older women.

I believe the culture of beauty perpetuates gender oppression and gender inequality amongst women and men because it often conveys to society that women are *objects* to be enhanced--often for male consumption. Women are continually *reduced* to their bodies; consequently, women are frequently *not* seen as full human beings. Moreover, through this timely cultural norm, women have ended up unconsciously

perpetuating and participating in their own objectification.

There are many forms of gender oppression that are directed at women, and the culture of beauty is only one of them. Many people have never considered the beauty industry to be an extension of the patriarchy or an example of oppression on women; however, if a person observes just how successful this billion-dollar beauty industry is, one may notice that *this industry thrives off the insecurities of women,* which is the fuel that feeds the culture of beauty. Understanding the culture of beauty and its effects on society will help mitigate the powerful influence it has on individuals across the globe.

Gender Oppression: There is not one exclusive definition for gender oppression. Gender oppression can represent unjust treatment or control of a human being. It can also signify mental pressure or mental distress on someone.

Chapter 1: The Body

What is physically attractive & who decides?

There are many physical standards of attraction within our society, and these standards are *dynamic* in nature. Many of us have even witnessed these shifting standards of physical attractiveness within our society, but it seems that one constant remains--specifically for Western Society: slim is better. However, voluptuous and curvy bodies are increasingly becoming more accepted and desired (another example of the shifting beauty trends in mainstream society).

Skinny Vs. Voluptuous, or *Both*

Since the beginning of time, there have been varying specifications for what is considered physically attractive for the human body.

In America, slim was and still has been the go-to trend for what a female body should look like. However, being curvy and voluptuous has also been a growing trend throughout the years (e.g. Marilyn Monroe, Christina Hendricks, and Nicki Minaj). Another growing trend is the combination of both a small frame plus curves. I am not sure who came up with these trends, but you can always get a feel of what the most popular trends are in the music you listen to and what you see and hear about in any type of media. Also, you can tell what some of the trends are by the way a majority of clothing brands design their clothes. What sizes are these brands making their clothes, and what shapes and sizes of women are these brands catering to?

Despite these trends, it is important to do what is best for yourself. What do you desire your body to look and feel like? What is going to be the most attractive look for your body in *your own opinion?* This is essentially what matters most.

Destiny S. Harris

Society will always have guidelines and physical trends for the body that will make claims and opinions on what is considered most attractive, but at the end of the day it doesn't really matter. At a granular level, being physically attractive may open some doors for you, get you a few more friends, and provide some other shallow perks, but at the end of the day being physically attractive isn't worth much. However, many women spend most of their life and time being concerned with their physical appearance. Many women aim and aspire to look like the perceived "perfect" celebrities they see in the media on a consistent basis. Learn how to decide for yourself what is attractive and leave it at that. Live a healthy and balanced lifestyle that maximizes your body and ignore what is classified as attractive and beautiful according to societal standards.

If you have a naturally thick body, accept it. If you have a naturally slim body, accept it. If you

have a naturally curvy body, accept it. If you have an out of shape body or you feel overweight or want to shed some extra pounds to feel and look healthier, accept where you are currently, while you make some healthy changes at the same time. If you have a muscular body, accept it. All of us have unique and different shapes that we must appreciate. We do not need to give the media the power to decide if our bodies are attractive or not attractive.

Chapter 2: Media Influences

Popular opinion on what is considered beautiful and attractive is often dictated and influenced by the media (e.g. magazines, entertainment, advertisements, music, etc.).

Society's obsession with the body (especially the female body) and physical attractiveness has proved to be highly influential on the body images of women; women's body images have often been negatively affected by society's focus on the female body. Furthermore, women's bodies in general are over-sexualized and magnified to be either criticized or praised.

Media is everywhere. We hear it. We see it. Many of us ponder on it both consciously and subconsciously. We feel it through the messages that are being conveyed (e.g. music). Media is powerful and influential, and media continues to expand its influence on society in various ways.

Because media is so influential on society, it has affected many people both positively and negatively.

Technology in combination with media can really change the way people are depicted in advertisements and entertainment, which delivers consistent standards and examples of *perfection* (which are essentially often impossible to achieve).

People that consistently engage in media everyday (e.g. television, music, social media) are usually affected in some form whether positive or negative. A good way to test how much the media has impacted your self-image is to take a break from social media, television, film, and certain kinds of music for one to three weeks. Notice how you feel about yourself during the duration of your media detox. In fact, you can even take notes on how you feel about yourself each day while you do this activity. If you

complete this activity, be sure to log how you feel about your overall external and internal self before you begin the media detox. I guarantee that, besides having media withdrawals, you will feel more positive about your self-image after completing this activity. If you want to start small, choose one source of media to detox from for one week, and then a different form of media the next week. It is a good idea to take breaks from media *throughout* life to maintain balance.

Media Challenge (1-14 Days):

- Each day, log how you feel about yourself externally and internally. Feel free to log about other things as well.

Pre-Challenge Log Day 0:

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_____

_____

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Media Challenge Log Day 1:

Media Challenge Log Day 2:

Media Challenge Log Day 3:

Media Challenge Log Day 4:

Media Challenge Log Day 5:

Media Challenge Log Day 6:

Media Challenge Log Day 7:

Media Challenge Log Day 8:

Media Challenge Log Day 9:

Media Challenge Log Day 10:

Media Challenge Log Day 11:

Media Challenge Log Day 12:

Media Challenge Log Day 13:

Media Challenge Log Day 14:

Music

One of the most powerful and influential types of media is: music. Music videos, music lyrics,

music messages, and music meanings are all powerful and can dictate how people feel and live their lives.

Music Videos

Not all music videos perpetuate and convey negative messages. In fact, many music videos are positive, funny, interesting, and entertaining. However, many music videos show people that look perfect. Some videos cast woman for one purpose it seems: objectification (this is changing in many modern videos in some instances). When women are constantly portrayed as objects to be gazed upon with no regard to who they are as a person, it leads many women astray. Many women become obsessed with their *external* image.

Learn to see yourself as a complete person. In many videos, women often wear less clothing while the men are often fully clad. In my opinion, clothing in music videos can represent how much

of “the self” a person is revealing. Women in these videos, who are wearing less clothing than men, are often revealing less of their internal selves by putting more focus and attention on their external bodies, which distracts a person from seeing who they truly are (this constant message also conveys that the internal body is not as important as the external body).

Music Video Recommendation: Colbie Caillat - Try

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Chapter 3: Love Yourself

The goal of this book is to inform you of the culture of beauty. However, another goal of this book is to remind you to love, appreciate, respect, and value yourself. So often as women we let others have the power to choose and decide our worth. It is time to step up and choose how we are going to view ourselves. How can we expect others to treat us with respect if we don't treat ourselves with respect? How can we expect others to view us positively if we don't view ourselves positively?

Learn how to love yourself with everything that comes with you--flaws and all. Be comfortable with who you are and stay true to yourself. People enjoy being around others who appreciate themselves and are comfortable within themselves. Learn to *mold yourself* instead of letting society mold *you*.

Become a conscious participant in different forms of media. In fact, it is important to become a conscious participant of society in general. Be aware of different messages that advertisements, music, images, prominent figures, and people, etc. are conveying to not only you, but everyone else as well. When you understand and are aware of the messages that the media conveys, you will be less affected by it.

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Sayings

To let another person's way of dress encapsulate you into the act of judgement of their character or into establishing a level of respect for them is a fallacy. I love showing skin, and the way I dress is *never* an invitation.

Women that hate their bodies aren't naturally predisposed to; much of society and media teaches them to. Love yourself and love your body. Your self-worth is *never* equivalent to your appearance.

Women do not owe men beauty. The only person you owe anything to is yourself: to be the best you can be holistically. Don't let society nor fleeting physical attributes determine your worth. You are priceless.

Why do more women versus men, feel the need or have the desire to enhance their physical

attractiveness by wearing consistent makeup, getting plastic surgery, dieting, etc.? Whoever told women that physical attractiveness is *that* important?

They believe their beauty declines because a *number* increases. #Age

I wish women could walk around shirtless like men--without being over-sexualized or ostracized. I wish nakedness wasn't such a taboo idea. This inequality can insinuate that the female gender has been reduced to a sexual object more so than the male gender.

Women's faces are not incomplete, unattractive, tired-looking, or unprofessional without makeup. Women, you don't need to *try* to be beautiful...you already are--from the inside out.

I think *they* forget that we can like sex too.

I believe consistently investing in your personal health and fitness is the ideal way to transform and maximize your *natural body*.

Women are powerful but not because of their beauty.

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